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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [HN](#)
SUBJECT: CHIEF OF DEFENSE ROMEO VASQUEZ VELASQUEZ TO STAY
ON THREE MORE YEARS

Classified By: Ambassador Charles A. Ford, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (U) Late on November 26 it was announced that General Romeo Vasquez Velazquez, who was appointed by President Maduro as Chief of Defense (CHOD) in 2004, would be staying on in this position for an additional three years, for a total of six years in the position. Vasquez was slated for retirement beginning January 11, 2008. Air Force General Venacio Cervantes, Army General Francisco Ordonez Barahona, and Army Colonel Jose Rosa Doblado Padilla had been the leading candidates in both the press and the rumors mills. But at the time of the announcement, all the important leaders of the Honduran Armed Forces stood shoulder to shoulder in support of President Manuel Zelaya's decision.

¶2. (C) Comment: Vasquez is an extremely competent officer and a friend of the USG and the Embassy. He was appointed in 2004 to his position by President Ricardo Maduro, of the National Party, for a three-year term. The fact that Zelaya kept him on was an extremely positive sign and supported the apolitical nature of the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF). For months, the Embassy has been trying to figure out who would be taking over the CHOD position, with Vasquez insisting that if he were not offered a promotion or more challenging position, such as that of a Minister, he would retire to his cattle ranch in Olancho. When we got wind that he might be extended in this position, he told us that he would only accept the extension if he felt his country "was in danger."

¶3. (C) Comment (continued): The reaction within the HOAF was very negative, as the extension goes against all accepted procedures and protocol. By accepting this extension to six years, Vasquez effectively cuts out four generations of military officers (those who graduated with him, those who should be taking over the position in January, and those who should be ready for promotion in 2008 and 2009) from the possibility of promotion to CHOD. This is extremely detrimental to the morale of the HOAF. In addition, the political classes, who are extremely suspicious, are worried what Vasquez has promised to Zelaya in order to retain this position. And even if he has not promised anything to the President, they believe that if Zelaya does something rash, like an "auto-golpe" (self-coup) to keep himself in power, Zelaya might be able to convince Vasquez to support him because of a sense that Vasquez owes the President. We do not believe Vasquez would go this far, but would instead

support the Constitutional order. End Comment.
FORD